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Bennett Backs CIA

Congressman Charles E. Bennett has taken issue with some "very disturbing misimpressions" given the public by columnist Drew Pearson.

"There have been several articles in Drew Pearson's column regarding the CIA which the CIA assures me are not factual," says the Jacksonville Democrat, a member of the House CIA subcommittee.

Bennett says he inquired about two of them. Pearson claimed it can be verified that the CIA "hatched a plot to knock off Castro." The columnist said, "Whether the assassination plot was ever actually put into effect is disputed."

Washington



Roundup

Pearson also claimed the CIA has funneled funds through private foundations to help Negro voting registration and militant civil rights groups.

"I was shocked to read that there are indications the CIA considered the assassination of Castro," Bennett said. "I knew there was nothing I had heard in CIA committee hearings that the CIA has been a party to any assassinations."

Bennett says the CIA assured him that it "never considered the assassination of Castro or anybody else."

Another claim Bennett thinks is untrue is that the Southern Regional Council was given assistance by the CIA in the council's efforts in the civil rights movement.

"I have no recollection in CIA hearings that the CIA was involved in civil rights movements," he adds.

Pearson said, "The main conduit for CIA money to help the Negro voter registration drive was the Southern Regional Council, which received \$60,000 of CIA funds in 1963."

The money was channeled through the New World Foundation, Pearson said. He also said \$6,000 of CIA funds went to the Southern Regional Council through the Aaron E. Norman Fund in 1962.

The Pros And Cons

Pearson stated in his column, "Fund officials deny any knowledge of CIA financial ties; nevertheless, they are a fact."

Bennett says Richard Helms, head of the CIA, assured him that "not one penny went to them (Southern Regional Council) for civil rights purposes."

"I would object to any CIA funds going to the civil rights movement," says Bennett, "and they assured me none had ever been."

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Bennett says the CIA told him it has no plans for getting into the business of issuing press releases.

Bennett himself has been a target of Pearson's pen.

Recently, when Bennett was one of the central figures in the House battle to establish a strong ethics committee, Pearson quoted the congressman as saying he never saw Rep. L. Mendel Rivers, D-S.C., take a drink.

Pearson implied that if Bennett is named chairman of the newly created Committee on Standards of Official Conduct he will hear no evil, see no evil.

Pearson has charged that Rivers has a "drinking problem" which makes him a security risk. Rivers is a frequent target of Pearson.

Bennett says he has sat on the House Armed Services Committee with Rivers for almost 15 years. He says he has seen Rivers during the day and has attended parties with him.

"I have never seen him take a drink," says Bennett.

"Nobody even suggested that the problem of alcoholism would be before the ethics committee," Bennett says.

Sources Questioned

Bennett says Pearson quotes ex-employees of the Armed Services Committee as his sources. The congressman says these sources apparently have been off the committee staff for several years because it is a very stable staff.

He says there have not been any recent resignations from the committee staff.

"These are three instances of very disturbing misimpressions given the public by this column," Bennett says.

"I'm not trying to attack Mr. Pearson," Bennett says. "but I certainly believe the public should know the CIA is not involved in any assassination plots or is giving assistance to civil rights movements."

Bennett says Pearson is a friend of his and has had him out to dinner. He says he has not discussed these particular points with Pearson, adding that the columnist would not run a retraction anyway.

Enforcement Needed

Speaking of the newly established House ethics committee, as it is commonly called, Republican freshman Rep. J. Herbert Burke of Hollywood rose to the floor this week to urge that steps necessary to enforce official standards of conduct must be taken once they have been established by the group.

The committee was given no power to enforce anything.

"We can presume that enforcement power will be lodged with the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct," Burke said.

"But regardless of where it is ultimately placed, it is absolutely essential that the power to enforce official standards is vested in a committee of this House," the Florida congressman added.

"Make no mistake about it," he warned, "the public and the press will tolerate no dodging by us on this matter without crying 'foul.'"

Burke said the enforcement step "is just as critical" as the one taken to establish the committee.

On another matter, Burke urged the Justice Department to make a full, complete and prompt investigation into possible criminal violations in the Adam Clayton Powell case. He also urged a complete public disclosure of the findings.

Burke, who broke the news to the press that the Justice Department is conducting the investigation, added:

"It would appear to me that the integrity of the members of the United States Congress as well as the future of Mr. Powell are at issue; thus any investigation not honestly motivated by a sincere desire to obtain the truth in this matter would be a disservice to the American people."